



A Better Way Foundation is a Connecticut non-profit organization that is dedicated to a sensible shift in drug policy from one of incarceration to substance abuse treatment and public health

I would first like to thank Representative Linda A. Orange and the Judiciary Committee for raising House Bill 5445: the Good Samaritan Bill. I am writing today not only as the Board President of A Better Way Foundation, but as a social worker and citizen of suburban Connecticut. I am unable to stand before you, however, I hope that my voice is heard through this testimony:

I am White, Catholic, and Italian, raised in Suffield Connecticut by a single mother working two jobs to support a household of four. We lacked affordable housing, public transportation, but mostly we lacked our father. My memories of my father are scattered, almost non-existent, he was an addict, sometimes he couldn't make it, sometimes when he made he couldn't take us and had to leave. I knew something was wrong, but we didn't talk about "that".

My father got clean when I was 15 and he had a daughter. He and my sister's mother weren't able to stay sober. My sister lived between grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousin's houses when "it" was not good. My father eventually left. Her mother was addicted; she eventually died of an overdose. My sister just graduated the 8th grade, she was alone, but we don't talk about "that".

My father's brother's name was Ray. He was raised in Windsor Locks, worked as an electrician, loved his family. He made it to all the family gatherings whether he was sober or not. He lived with Nana, but sometimes stayed other places. When he was other places we worried, but never talked about "it". He really was trying this time, he checked himself in to the YMCA in Hartford, started a program. The call came on a Sunday afternoon; we just got home from church. Ray's daughter was 10 and laid across the casket during the wake. She asked, but we didn't talk about "that".

Anita is my mother's youngest sister. She is 45. She has used since she was 13 years old. We feel blessed on the days she calls us and to tells us she is here and well. She has a free spirit and is full of life. Sometimes I wait for the call. I know it will come one day soon. But we don't talk about "that".

I came to a Better Way Foundation as a volunteer while receiving my master degree at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Throughout my group project, I listened to the issues of prison overcrowding, high incarceration rates, drug disparity and I thought to myself how does this relate to me? Everyone I know who is addicted to drugs never makes it to prison, they are always found dead. Maybe if they had more support or programs, maybe if someone found them and helped them before it was too late.

Maybe you can be that person, maybe you can help "them" before it is too late. After all, you do know stories like this and even if you choose not to share them, you think about it just like me. I choose to be silent no longer. I choose to help a community that has been silenced.

Please support House Bill 5445 and pass it with a joint favorable vote!

Michelle L. Yorio, MSW  
Board President, A Better Way Foundation